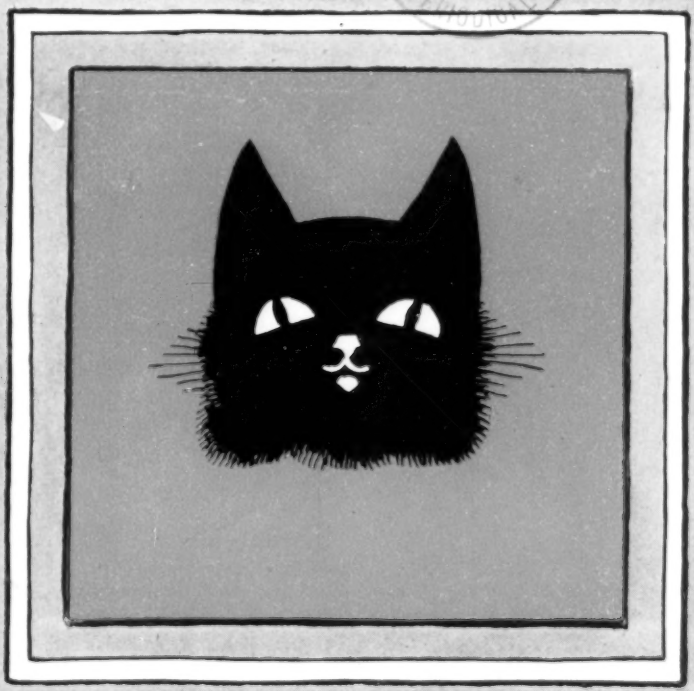
The Black Cat

JUL 30 1909



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Ten Cents

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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The Man Who Dropped Off.*

BY MARION HILL.

HE was a traveler whom activity of mind rather than restlessness of body impelled to seek the car platform at every stop made by his train. From that slight eminence, he good-naturedly exchanged remarks with all and any talkers whom sociable fate threw in his way. The information he thus chanced to pick up was all of a character to contradict the theories of life he had inclined to form at Law School, and was consequently extremely valuable,— which he was adaptable enough to realize.

This same generous adaptability induced him to look favorably upon all way stations,— whether of existence or of the more literal railroad track,— but the placid obscurity of Sunnytop proved too much for his regard.

"Lively, isn't it?" he called in cheerful irony to the one rail-sitter at Sunnytop depot, and he waved his hand towards the few low farmhouses, asleep in the noon glare, which constituted the town.

He was answered with perfectly courteous gravity by the sitter, a red-headed man in yellow overhauls, a man whose fortunate lack of education had wonderfully conserved his intellect.

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"Well, yes, it is," he admitted, proudly, but not unduly so. "To-day. Not in general, though. Are you going over?"

"Where?"

"To court."

"Court, eh? who's holding it?"

"Judge Kinney,— Jim Kinney,— know him?"

"No."

"Then you don't know how mad he is."

"Sounds as if I'm missing something. What's maddened him?"

"Holding court in the schoolhouse. It's cramping to legs and temper."

At this moment, just because his train was beginning to move under him, giving him no time to think, the traveler suddenly decided to visit Judge Kinney's court and therefore jumped lightly to the depot platform, letting his unregretted "accommodation" crawl cityward without him. Our not having time to think is responsible for all the interesting things which happen to us.

No one else left the train, a fact which was regretfully noted by the red and yellow man.

"I might as well have stayed to school," he murmured. "But Judge felt sure there'd be a crowd come and sent me here to pilot 'em back."

"Well, you've got me," said the traveler soothingly.

"Though it's tight fit enough, the school is, without any more crowd than what it's got a' ready." It is only the city mind which can be switched by jocular side issues; the country man sticks nobly to his theme. "Everybody's there."

"Why in the school-house?" asked the traveler.

He gave away an excellent cigar, lit one himself, and then trimmed his city stride to fit the more plodding gait of his rural guide, they both setting out by the one way of the dusty wagon road.

"Town hall burned down last night,— that's why the schoolhouse. Burned to the ground."

"Too bad. Loss heavy?"

"Several ton of good hay."

"Hay! what was hay doing there?"

"Burning," answered the other. "Town hall was over the blacksmith's shop and barn."

"Ah," said the traveler, expectant of further items. But there were none. The barn was burned and that was naturally the end of it. A farmer narrates facts without journalistic embellishments.

As a possible furtherance to conversation, the traveler then tendered his card.

The countryman took the card and read the name:

Mr. Judson Jurewell.

Then he handed the card back,— done with it.

Jurewell pleasantly recovered it. "And your name?" he asked.

"Samuel Hanse."

"And what is Judge Kinney handling to-day, Mr. Hanse?"

"Trying to handle Aunt Bessie; but no matter how much he proves to the dear old soul that she ain't no wife of the dead man's and never has been, she only says, mild-like and gentle, the way she always speaks, 'Now, Jimmie, you know better nor that'. And so he orter,— marriage license go-hang. But, land, Mr. Jurewell, you don't know head from tail about it, do you?"

"No. Suppose you tell me as we go along."

This, Samuel Hanse willingly did, unfolding an odd little tale of farm life in which comedy and tragedy strangely mingled.

Forty years ago there had come to Sunnytop, buying a small farm there, Joe Cummin and his wife Bessie, hard working, honest young people who had no other ambition except to be self-supporting and respected in the county where they elected to live. This ambition they had fully realized. Childless, they had become father and mother to the whole community, being affectionately known as Uncle Joe and Aunt Bessie to the grateful neighborhood for miles around. Aunt Bessie had experienced none of the joys of motherhood and all of its cares, for she had devotedly brought up her husband's two troublesome step-brothers, Jason and Isaac Hull. Bad as small children, "Jase" and "Ike" had grown up to dishonest and thankless maturity, deserting the farm when the old people most needed their aid and

coming back only after the old man's death, hoping to find themselves remembered in a will. But of course there was no will. Old Joe Cummin was without immediate kin and moreover had nothing to deed away except the undesirable little farm which he most rightfully considered was Bessie's as much as his, having been kept unincumbered chiefly by reason of her lifetime of hard work. As his widow, would she not naturally inherit the property and continue to live on in the old home, sheltered by its friendly shabbiness, nurtured by the grudging acres which would nevertheless afford her a sustenance? Why make a will? In looking for one, however, the hard-fibred Jase and Ike had discovered among the old man's papers a document which badly menaced Aunt Bessie's security.

In an envelope inscribed "Marriage Certificate" they had found merely an unsigned wedding license.

Interrogated, Aunt Bessie had freely given the information that she and Joe, wishing to save a minister's fee, had concluded that the license (costing the frightful sum of two dollars) was certainly binding and lawful enough, and consequently was all that was necessary. In other words, the couple had never been married.

Assured of this, Jase and Ike laid claim to the property. Aunt Bessie was nothing loath. She had worked for the two boys all her youth and did not utterly rebel at the prospect of having to slave for them in her old age. For she fancied that the extent of their claim merely entitled them to live upon her. However, they announced their intention of selling the place for what it would bring, quite callous as to what would become of the penniless and homeless old woman who had mothered them — and in speaking of her they used a vile name.

The epithet had struck poor Aunt Bessie like a whip-lash and had goaded her into fighting the proceedings.

"But she ain't got nothing to fight," concluded Samuel Hanse, sadly. "She admits all right that she and Joe never had no 'extra marriage' as she calls it, but she just peacefully makes fun of Judge and the others when they say she ain't no wife and she tells,— 'Boys, if I've been a good true wife to Joe for forty years, raising his brothers, nursing him and them when they was sick, cooking their victuals, hearing them their prayers, sewing

their clothes, working myself to skin and bone for 'em, how can the turning up of the very license that made me Joe's wife undo it all now that Joe's dead? Boys, don't be so silly. Get done fooling and let me go home. I won't be there so very long. Can't Jase and Ike wait till I'm with Joe?'"

Jurewell had the pleased look which he wore when he was playing chess and was planning "mate in two moves."

"She admits she was never married?" he asked.

"Admits it plum out."

"Admits that she knew it from the first?"

"All along. Evidently she and that poor old fool of an Uncle Joe never got over shaking hands with theyselves for their thrift in saving a parson's fee."

"And yet she is innocent of wrong doing?"

"As a baby. Aunt Bessie is sure an angel on earth if there ever was one. That license looked like law and gospel to her and does still."

"And have not the two men feeling enough to let the queer old soul alone for the few years she has to live?"

Samuel Hanse spat in the dust. "That for Jase's feelings," he said. He spat again. "And that for Ike's."

"You say she nursed them?"

"Through typhoid. Watched 'em night and day for ten weeks."

Jurewell had drawn out a notebook and was jotting things down.

"And raised them from boyhood?"

"From babyhood. Jase was a year old and Ike three when their parents died and Joe and Bessie took 'em."

"How much is the farm worth?"

"Jase and Ike would be hard pushed to get four thousand."

The two had now reached the schoolhouse, an old wooden building from whose windows hung crowds of struggling rustics, testifying to the greater crowds behind them. Outside, children, dogs, and vehicles made the scene look like a camp meeting.

Pushing his way inside, Jurewell noted that a sort of intermission was evidently taking place, for business order was entirely suspended and a babel of talk was going on. Hulking big

men, wedged in the little seats, kept their uncomfortable places, fearing to lose them should they get up to stretch their legs. Some few were making an unembarrassed lunch from huge sandwiches, taking unconcerned bites almost in their companions' faces. A proud urchin, barefooted and perspiring, who would not have sold out his stand for a million, was carrying around a bucket of water, and a tin cup. He was working twice as hard as there was any need to and consequently was multiplying his own enjoyment.

The Judge, a gray-haired man of about fifty, was seated at the teacher's desk and was pretending to take deep interest in some papers before him concerning the ever vital country question of boundary fences, fences not put up where they should be, or put up where they should not be. He was the only one who was not audibly espousing Aunt Bessie's cause, which had evidently been lost.

Jase and Ike having absolutely no henchmen in that quarter of the globe were reduced to the necessity of talking to each other, and it may be said that both had a most undesirable listener. They were intensely stupid men and made the fact more than patent by their constantly repeated assertion that they were too "smart to be soft-soaped by everybody who came along."

"Aunt Bessie" sat on one of the recitation benches. She was a tiny little creature, with washed-out blue eyes set deeply in a thin, spiritual face banded by hair so smooth and white that it looked like the demure linen of a nun. Her knotted old hands that never were comfortable in idleness were tremulously clasped in her decent black alpaca lap. She was of the type of women who can fight even all the foes of darkness when intrenched within the mystic solace and refuge of their own home, but who are absolutely stricken to the death when torn away from their familiar place; women who more tenderly love a geranium slip they have raised in a tin can than the finest blossoms that may be bought; women to whom each chair is a sacred family heirloom, each garden shrub a record of events, being either a monument to some hope's achievement, or a shaft to mark the grave where a hope lies buried.

"Jase and Ike never planted the lilac hedge," she was saying, in a wondering tone to three or four women around her. "How can it be their place?" Then, slightly raising her voice so as to be heard at the desk, "Jimmie, *you* know who planted the lilacs, 'cause you helped me,— you was a little boy about ten."

"Jimmie" convulsively tightened his grip on his pencil, but gave no other sign of having heard the appeal,— not but what the sympathetic distress on his face showed heartfelt corroboration of every word she said. His duty had plainly been a hard one.

"Now Jedge Kinney — he's a man of good horse sense," Jason Hull was saying to his brother, both furtively glimpsing the eulogised one to see if the praise was effective. "Jedge isn't going to hev honest men cheated of their lawful due."

"And lawful it is," said Isaac, glancing scowlingly around in criticism of the general condemnation. "Who *could* the farm belong to, if not us, the sole survivin' relatives of brother Joe who never married and never had no children?"

"Jimmie," quavered Aunt Bessie gently, "can't you make 'em shut up? Don't seem hardly brotherly for 'em to talk that way about Joe, and Joe dead."

The tow-haired little Ganymede with the water having here come near to Jurewell, he gave him his card and asked him to take it to "His Honor," amending the title, at the boy's stare, to the more familiar one of "Jim Kinney."

That the name on the card was not so unknown to His Honor as it had been to Samuel Hanse was evidenced immediately by the expectant look which appeared in Judge Kinney's face as he raised his eyes to hunt among the throng for the owner of the bit of pasteboard just handed to him.

Jurewell met the glance and bowed profoundly.

"Have I your permission to say a few words?" he asked.

"Certainly, Mr. Jurewell," said the Court, not needing to request silence, for a curious hush was already established. Every eye was on the stranger who spoke so authoritatively.

"Your condescension in permitting me to speak is as great and unusual as is my effrontery in asking for the favor, but in extenuation let me say that great and unusual also is the interest

taken by me in the circumstances of the case which has just been heard, your decision concerning which does credit to your sense of justice, refusing, as it does, to be biased even by the weighty considerations of sentiment and your personal regard for the parties chiefly involved." Jurewell was in the realms of pure guesswork at the moment, but, inclining his head deferentially to Aunt Bessie and nodding with scant ceremony in indication of the brothers Hull, he found that public opinion was with him and therefore proceeded jubilantly. "These — gentlemen," he continued, nodding again at the victors, and poising on the word so as to render it distinctly uncomfortable, "are to be congratulated that the law is no respecter of persons and has consequently put into their hands the power to recover the property that so rightfully belongs to them."

Jase and Ike, who had been slightly uneasy, now cheered visibly, undeterred by the dissent which quivered over the assembly, and by the fact that Aunt Bessie's pale blue eyes, which had been fixed hopefully upon the stranger, not unprepared to see in him a heaven-sent champion, had filled with heart-break and disappointment again.

"To the relinquisher of the property," went on Jurewell turning to her, "I have this to say: although in the eyes of the Lord and in the esteem of the community, there is no stain upon her fair fame, she being the most faithful of wives, the most honest and honorable of women, still, the law having decreed that she never owned a wife's position, the law takes cognizance of the fact that she therefore holds a valid claim against the estate." Tapping the paper upon which he had been making notes, but carefully refraining from explaining that they *were* but notes, Jurewell said impressively, "Here is a statement of the claim presented,— For forty years of service, as housekeeper to the late Joe Cummin, rated at five dollars a week, nine thousand six hundred dollars; ten years' service as governess to the half brothers of the deceased, two thousand four hundred dollars; ten weeks' service as sick nurse, two hundred dollars,— total fourteen thousand dollars. This is a just and lawful claim, the payment of which the claimant will certainly exact. The value of the property being but four thousand dollars, it seems hardly likely that

she will accept from Isaac and Jason Hull a deed to the farm in equitable exchange, yet my advice to her would be to do so."

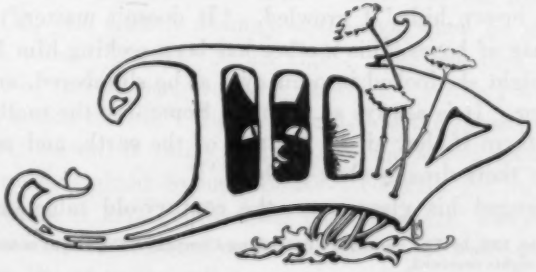
The fine points in Jurewell's presentment appealed first to the clerk of the court, a sunburnt young man in a bright pink shirt, and he emitted a prolonged chuckle, his Honor soon followed the example, finally the whole throng joined in, sending around the schoolhouse a laugh which rang as joyously as a cheer, bringing amazed resentment but to two.

"Monkey business isn't law," they shouted threateningly.

But Aunt Bessie held otherwise. Pressing to Jurewell's side, she took his hand and kissed it humbly.

"It's good of you, sir. Thank you, sir," she said, timidly. No further words could she find, but the big tears which rolled down her cheeks made words unnecessary. Then turning to the Judge, she dipped a little curtsy and said with meek determination, "Jimmie, I think I'm through here, and so I'm going home."

Quite refusing to bother her head with the ideas that Jason and Isaac might fight the case and that it might be long before any reversal could be made in her favor, satisfied that her friends would never shut in her face the kindly door which Jurewell had opened, she kissed again the helping hand, bobbed again to the Court, and then thankfully trudged out into the sunlight, her face turned towards the little farm where she had come as a bride, forty years ago, where she had lived with "Joe," where she had held him in her arms when he died, and, from where she had buried him — with clusters of lilac on his quiet heart,— the only place which could be "home" to her, on this side of eternity.



The Prodigal.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

"IT comes to every wanderer at some time in his wanderings," said Galt, looking out through the dirty window of Bhatto Ghan's River Alley restaurant at Singapore. "It comes to every one of us drifters, and when the voice is strong enough we strike the home trail."

"Ay, ay," murmured Maloney, a little red-headed Irishman, who acted as agent for a Jew firm at Calcutta. "It's right you are, Sandy."

"There is no such person as a cosmopolitan," growled the big Scotchman. "I thought I met one once when we were jerking a trestle bridge over a stream up at Simla, but he was a fraud. He left one night and when I went round to his bungalow in the morning I found a little scrap of paper stuck in the thatch. It just read: 'Gone home to England.' Yes, by the axe of Bruce that was all — not another word. And that sun-tanned devil had been telling me month after month that he had neither home nor country."

"Ay, ay," chanted Maloney. "I've said the same, bad luck to me."

"I cursed him over-right, the Lascar serang," continued Galt, "but that old monkey-faced nigger told me to stop. 'His mother looked at him last night,' said he. 'His mother is in England, damn his brown hide,' I growled. 'It doesn't matter,' squeaked that old bag of bones, 'his mother has been seeking him for years, and last night she looked into his eyes as he slumbered, and he has gone to her. It is always so, Sahib. Some day the mother's eyes will find them if they sit on the rim of the earth, and when they see her in their dreams they go back.'"

Galt banged his glass upon the century-old table, and when

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Bhatto Ghan had delivered the drinks, a silence fell upon the group. The hot sun turned the street puddles into vapor masses that floated upwards, thick and stifling, and the voices from the café chantant came through in intermittent bursts as if they had seized favorable moments when the air was clear.

There were five in the party, and no man was within three thousand miles of his birthplace. It was Maloney's recital of an attempt he made to reach Cork that had caused the Scotchman to make his observations. The little Irishman had shipped as a stoker on a big P. & O. boat at Melbourne, but the red mouths in the bowels of the ship had eaten up his homelonging before he reached Colombo. There, Maloney deserted, and deferred the pleasure of re-visiting Queenstown till his pocket could pay for superior travelling accommodation.

Presently Meehlin shifted his long legs and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"That's right about the voice," he said, with the air of a man who knows that his assertion is incontrovertible. "I know all about the voice. I struck Wellington, New Zealand, in 1900; rode down on a leaking wind-jammer from Vancouver, and the voice found me the moment I was on the quay. One of the New Zealand Steamship Company's boats was just getting ready to buck across to Sydney, and the voice made me buy a forty-shilling steerage ticket an' hike aboard. Every mile of that trip the voice got to whisperin' stronger. 'Jimmy,' it said, 'you haven't seen yer old mother for seven years — seven years, just think of it. Never mind about yer stepfather, Jimmy, don't think of yer little differences with him. If he kicks yer again, like he did before, don't take any notice of him.' That was the tune it sang to me. Oh, yes, Galt is Johnny-on-the-spot when he gives lingo about the voice. It gets you all right. The one that called me was a sort of two-thousand-mile radius voice. While I was buzzin' about up round Seattle I didn't hear it, but the moment I struck windy Wellington, it fairly poured into me sound accumulators, and before we sighted Sydney Heads I couldn't get any sleep at nights because it kept reproaching me for stayin' away too long.

"The moment I tumbled on to the wharf, the voice swirled me up George Street to the railway station. I bought a second-class

ticket for Bourke, and then went across the road to get something to eat before the Western Mail pulled out for its run to the Darling. I couldn't eat; felt as if I had a balloon in me insides, so I came back and cursed the porters until we swung out. All the way up in the train that voice made me sick with joy. The old bare gumtrees, the ti-tree scrub, the gray plains, the dusty drovers, every bloomin' thing got tuggin' at me heart strings, an' when I got out at Bourke I felt all sore round the ribs like as if some one had been slammin' me with sixteen-ounce gloves."

Maloney made a sound that resembled a suppressed sob, and Meehlin looked at him curiously.

"My dad had been a 'cockatoo selector,' you know. We had a little patch between two big patches, and the squatters on the two big lots hated Dad like poison. When he died, Mother married McCarty just to have a man round the place to give back lip to the boundary riders, and it was that little mean-souled son of a gun who snapped my home cable an' set me driftin' in the first place. However, the voice told me to forget all that, an' I tried to. When I announced myself that evening he pumped my right hand up an' down like a feller that's tryin' to restore breathin' in some guy who has been in the wet, but I took it agreeable, an' you could hear the swish of the wings of Peace when I was telling about me wanderings.

"Next day that little knock-kneed hound of a stepfather asked me to give him a hand in poleaxeing a steer, and I agreed to whip the pelt off just to show him I hadn't forgotten the game. I was three parts through with the job when the door of the shed opened and a mounted trooper covered me with his popgun. The voice wasn't doing much calling at that minute. You see, Stepdad hadn't a calf of his own to kill in honor of my return, so he had grabbed one of the nearest squatters an' that cop caught me red-handed. Cattle duffing had been getting too common an' they were watching round. The cop took me an' he took Stepdad, too, tied us one to each stirrup iron. That was pretty good luck for McCarty.

"They must have seen I was in a bit of a temper, 'cause they put us into two different cells, but there was a little hole in the slabs, an' all through the night that old calf-stealer kept asking

me to shoulder the blame of the whole show. 'They didn't catch me, Jimmy,' he kept on saying, over an' over again. 'They only caught you, Jimmy.' 'What's the good of two of us going in? Who'll look after your mother, Jimmy? Who'll shear the sheep? Who'll keep yer little brother at school, Jimmy?' It wasn't the voice that pulled me aboard the steamer *Wairapa* that I heard that night. He got me that mad that I poked my finger in his eye when he was looking through the hole, an' I got a little peace after that.

"Well, that jury believed McCarty. They sent that old scoundrel back home, and a new voice came to my ears. It was the voice of the trail that called me day an' night for two years while I lay in Dubbo jail, an' when I used to look at the guards on the wall I swore I'd never imitate the prodigal son again. Those were the three kinds of voices I heard. First, the voice that calls you home, — the one Galt was tellin' you about; secondly, the voice of that old calf-stealing cuss in Bourke lock-up; and thirdly, the voice of the trail."

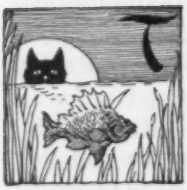
Maloney broke the silence. "Did you go back — afterwards?" he asked.

"Did I?" cried Meehlin, the arm muscles hunching under the sleeves of his coat. "No, I was afraid. I was afraid that I might kill him or that he might kill another calf. One of the two things might have happened, an' I would have got the worst of the deal. I'm off calves an' stepfathers for all time."

He stood up, stretched his great frame, and walked down to the water front where craft of all nations rocked in the yellow waters, their masts, like gigantic fingers, beckoning to stay-at-home folk to whom the trail had never called.

The Goat and the Ghosts.*

BY HOMER CROY.



THE girl calmly reached into the bait-can, deftly attached a bit of meat to the fish-hook, and dropped the line into a pail of water. She leaned forward, peering down into the water in breathless suspense as if she expected each moment to land the prize catch of the season. Her jeweled hand held the pole with suppressed excitement. It was a pretty, athletic but still girlish figure. Over her face was a heavy veil.

A crowd quickly congregated around the girl and the bucket. The citizens of the sleepy little college town of Manchester became eager with excitement, and packed in around the fisherwoman. It lacked five minutes of midday; the spring sun glowed down kindly. It was just the sort of day to set one thinking of baited lines, shady pools, and of leaping fish. But the river was three miles away, and the nearest lake was at least ten. The water in the pail was so clear that the bottom could be seen quite plainly. The bait was the only thing in the water.

The girl jerked the bamboo pole with the quick snap of an accomplished fisherwoman. The line came up empty. Her actions plainly showed that it was a keen disappointment that the imaginary fish had escaped. She looked critically at the bait, then dropped the line again.

The crowd gathered in closer, but still the fair fishergirl was apparently as utterly by herself as if she were in the wilds of Canada instead of on the main street of Manchester, Iowa. A look of wondering curiosity flashed from one to another of those gathered, but no one had an explanation. A fleshy man whispered over his shoulder to a companion, "Do you suppose she is — ?" He finished by tapping his forehead.

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His friend shook his head vigorously.

The girl occasionally glanced at the clock on the courthouse steeple half a block away. When the noon hour began pealing forth she wound up her line, unjointed her pole and turned away.

An understanding smile burst over the face of the crowd, as the people began to take their separate ways. "A sorority initiation," said one. "Don't you see? It is one of their stunts?"

As the girl started off down the street, a pleasant faced young man from the edge of the crowd hurried up and raised his hat. "I beg your pardon," said he, "but I wish to compliment you on how well you did it. It was the best I ever saw, and my enthusiasm has moved me to speak to you."

The girl turned to him in wonderment, and removed her veil.

"You see," the well built young man hastened on to explain, "I saw your pledge button. My sweetheart is a member of that sorority, too. I already half way feel as if I knew you. I am a stranger here. I have brought a show to this town which will open to-morrow. I have trained animals, trick ponies and the like. I am a college fraternity man myself, but this year I am out with my little show trying to make enough money to put me through school next year. I have gone through those initiation ceremonies myself, so I can sympathize with you."

Miss Verna Avery had merely been carrying out one of the initiation decrees of the college Greek letter society into which she was about to be fully initiated. For a week now she had been doing all kinds of ridiculous things, such whimsical oddities as only college girls can think of. The day before she had taken her knitting and gone to the President's house, sat serenely down in the parlor, taken the ball of yarn out of the basket, and methodically set to work. The President's wife had been a little horrified at first, but soon saw that it was a sorority "stunt" and had laughed heartily at the joke.

The two fell into step. "Well, this is rather unceremonious," laughed Miss Avery, "but when one is a neophyte one does things a little bit out of the ordinary. But the worst of it is yet to come. I didn't mind that little exhibition up on the corner as much as I dread what is to take place to-night. I have

to ride the goat, as we say, to-night for proper. I have begged the girls to tell me something about it, but they maintain that sphinx silence that makes one's blood grow cold. Every time I speak of what is to take place to-night, they shiver and look sorry for me. I just know they will do something awful to me."

"You mustn't let them frighten you that way," solaced the young man. "It is never as bad as you expect. I remember that the night before I was taken in I didn't sleep a wink."

"But you don't know our girls," said Verna Avery, gaining confidence. "I am so noisy and rompety around the house and play so many tricks on the other girls that they are going to make up for it to-night. Every time you don't do something they want you to during your neophyte period you have to make up for it good and strong goat night. Last night, after I had played tennis all evening, and was as hungry as a mythological bear, and just as I was sitting down to dinner, they wanted me to go down town — clear down to the post-office — after a two-cent stamp. I didn't go — I was too hungry. I am so afraid of what they will do to me to-night."

"Haven't they given you any idea of where they are going to take you?" pursued the showman.

"I know only this much — that they are going to take me to that old deserted house there," — pointing out a shambly frame at the end of a cross street setting back some little distance from the road — "and there finish up the ceremonies. That's where the goat comes in."

The showman whistled. "I've got an idea," he exclaimed.

The two turned off into a side street where the young man unfolded his scheme.

A long line of ghosts slipped in silence down the middle of the street toward a deserted, gloomy house. Two ghosts at the head led a shrinking figure clad in black. No straggling pedestrians were on the lone street; the only sound was the soft shuffle of a dozen pairs of shoes in the dirt.

A marshal ghost fitted a key, and pushed open the door. The hinges creaked dismally. Inside, in a big, deserted room, a circle formed silently, save now and then for the complaint of

a loose board. Half sitting, half standing, the circle gathered around the helpless figure in the middle. One flickering candle set in a death's-head threw distorted, dancing shadows. The low, subdued breathing of the girls made the air fairly pulsate with tension and uncanniness.

One of the girls arose and stood over the candidate as she bowed with her head to the floor. "Oh, unworthy seeker after the shrine of Zeta," said as sepulchral a voice as the head initiator could command, with halting deliberation, "thou art now before the holy Altar of Rodolomas. In the tests that have gone before thou hast proved thyself worthy, but there is still one more test, a more trying one, a hundred times more difficult, that thou must pass through before thou mayest bear the title of Zeta." The initiator-in-chief paused a moment, while intense silence filled the house. At the signal all the girls held their breath. A rafter creaked, and each girl seized her neighbor. Then the low, suppressed voice began again: "Before thee is the cold, dry death's-head — bend forward — kiss it — then the Altar of Rodolomas willst be opened to thee. Now, if thou failest — "

A decided shuffle and scratching of toe-nails filled the room. The voice stopped abruptly, and pained silence held while something came in short, heavy leaps out of an adjoining room toward the girls. Two eyes glowed in the dark. The pale candle in the skull showed a furred animal leaping into the air, coming nearer every moment. It paused, sniffed on the floor a moment, its tongue licked up something, then it leaped again much nearer the hushed, trembling girls.

A series of wild shrieks filled the room, and with a common fear the girls flew to the door and tumbled out, and ran in mad, terror-stricken haste down the road. Not one stopped or looked back until the sorority house was reached. Even with the lights on they sat there in cold, blanched fear.

"It leaped as high as my head," declared one, drawing back into the davenport.

"I heard it growl," exclaimed another. "I am positive I did. It was a low, guttural growl, like a panther's!"

The door-bell rang. The girls leaped to their feet as if the

animal might still be pursuing them. When the door was finally opened, Verna Avery was calmly standing there.

"It took you a long time to open the door," she said, complacently arranging her hair. She looked no more frightened than if she had merely walked around the block.

"But what — where — what was it?" echoed a dozen frightened voices.

Verna Avery sat down at the piano and exasperatingly ran the scale. At last she turned around, and seemed to be struck of a sudden with an idea. "Oh, say, girls, I have some passes for that new show that has just come to town if you want to go to-morrow. They say that they have a trained kangaroo there that leaps around over the floor and picks up lumps of sugar. The manager himself told me that it was very gentle and wouldn't hurt anybody."

"But what in the world have you in that pocket?" exclaimed one of the girls, pointing to Verna Avery's bulging side pocket.

"Sugar," smiled Verna Avery.

Conducted by the Deceased.*

BY WALTER MAY.

HALTINGLY the members of the Carbondale Orchestra Club finished their concert and descended from the hall to their social room.

Fritz Liebknecht, the genial tobacconist, carefully deposited his cello in its case and looked around good-humoredly at the despondent faces of his comrades, his blue eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

"Vell?" he said interrogatively.

"It was a frost — a cold, white, hoary frost!" wailed Ellen Lloyd, the little schoolma'am, dropping her violin case heavily upon the table. The others assented gloomily.

"Why they not come no more to our concerts?" demanded Liebknecht, drawing forth a meerschaum from his locker and filling it.

"Well, why don't they?" echoed Griffith Evans, the conductor, gloomily.

Ellen Lloyd sat looking thoughtfully into the fire. Presently she spoke.

"I believe it's owing to Tom Marshall's death. He founded the Club. He always conducted at our concerts. Naturally, the people came to think that the club couldn't exist without him. They don't realize that he brought us up to the point where we could go on by ourselves. Grif is a good conductor, and we are doing good work — high-class work. If they only would realize, and support us! If they don't, we may lose our Club home!"

There was a dejected murmur of assent.

"If Tom had only lived, he would have pulled us through," mused Anna Marik, the cornetist.

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Here Paulsen, the big Swede, who played the trombone, took his pipe from his mouth and spoke reflectively.

"Tom just lived music! Many a time in the mine I pass the forge and hear Tom's hammer tap, tap, the iron — always a tune — always some tune that sing itself in hees head. I call out the tune as I pass. Often I am right."

"The Largo was his favorite always," said Miss Marik, reflectively.

"Let us blay dot Largo for gut night," suggested Liebknecht. reaching for his cello case. There was, however, no answer to this suggestion; so the old man paused and puffed reflectively at his meerschaum.

"Gott im Himmel!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Dass ist es, dass ist es! Ve vill do it, yes!"

Thereupon he reached over, and opening the case handed Ellen Lloyd her instrument. She took it and mechanically tuned the strings. The others made no move. He drew forth his cello and, reaching for the switch, turned off the electric light, thus leaving the room illumined only by the fire glow.

"You vill not assist?" he queried, looking around. "Denn vill ve do it allein, Fräulein Ella. Begin now," he whispered. Soft and low sang the strings in Handel's Wonder Melody. One by one the listeners took their instruments, and before the end many were playing. It was Ellen's violin which led, but so clear was their memory for their late loved leader, that to many it seemed as though he stood before them again, baton in hand, leading with the old familiar gestures.

"O Tom, Tom!" murmured Ellen, as she lowered her violin. "If you were only with us, you would pull us through!"

"He vill do it, yes!" exclaimed Liebknecht, waving his cello bow. "By der next concert! You leaf dot to me! Dot hall sall be pack full! Zey sall pay premium for de seat! He vill pull us out of dot hole! Yah, he vill do it!"

He began to pace excitedly up and down the room.

"What are you saying, Fritz?" demanded Paulsen, amused at the old man's excitement.

"I mean vat I say! You do vat I say und dot hall sall be pack full! Efery seat iss taken! Ve vill do it, yes!"

He nodded emphatically and his comrades crowded around him, eager and curious.

"What will we do?" demanded Evans.

"Diss ve vill do. You vill lead us. You vill haff de finest program you cann make, und ve vill practise like der Teufel! De last piece vill be de Largo. Effery efening ve vill blay it mit de lights out and mitout notes. Denn, next mont', ve vill giff a concert. De Largo ist der last biece on der program. De hall iss pack, yes! Dey se dot ve are still alife, dot ve still can play!"

"How can you pack the hall, Fritz?" demanded Evans, sceptically.

"No, I not dell you dat, I do it! You leaf to me de advertising. If I not do it, I bay all dot cost, und, yess, I forfeit all my stock in dot club-house!" He nodded emphatically.

"We will all lose our stock, for that matter," said Ellen. "If we can't get the people out we'll lose everything. The mortgage will take it all. Say, Grif, let's take a chance with Fritz. We can't lose by it."

Griffith Evans, president and leader of the club, stood leaning on the mantel, staring moodily into the fire.

"What do you mean to do, Fritz?" he asked.

The old man came close to him and looked up squarely into his eyes. "I say noting! I do it, but I say notings, to you, to any man! Not till dot concert. You leaf dot to me. I do it!"

"I believe you will, Dutchy," cried Evans smiting him on the back. "What say you all? Shall we leave it to Fritz? Aye or No?"

There was a shout of "Aye."

Never had the club worked harder. Never had the rehearsals been conducted with such snap and vigor as in the days that followed. Even in Marshall's time they had never played so well. Evans gained confidence as the players improved and his conducting showed steadily increasing technical command. No one would think of failure, yet not one had the slightest knowledge of how success might be attained, of how Fritz would keep his promise. He said only:

"You do your part — I do mine, yes!"

And after each rehearsal they would turn out the lights, and play the Largo. For this they had no leader. They followed the voice of Ellen's violin, and as she played she seemed to see before her the figure of their old director, Marshall.

At length came the day for announcing the concert, and as the men of the club started that morning for the mines they were not less amazed than were their fellow-townsmen to read the posters everywhere displayed. After the formal announcement was this:

SPECIAL:

The concert will be concluded by a rendering of the LARGO, to be conducted in person by THOMAS MARSHALL, deceased.

Black with the grime of the mines, and thoroughly angry, Grif Evans stalked into Liebknecht's tobacco shop, on his way home from work that night.

"What do you mean, Fritz, by such nonsense? You may be a fool yourself if you want to, but you have no right to make fools of us all! Everybody is guying us! What do you mean by it?"

Fritz calmly puffed his pipe.

"You vant to know, Grif?" he asked, calmly.

"Yes, I do!" exploded the irate leader.

"Yah, I tink so. More as fifty fellers haf been here already, yes. Dey vant to know! Dey don't find out! Nobody knows dat but me. Dey all come out to dot concert. Dot hall vas full! See?"

The big Welshman looked the little German in the eye.

"Well, Fritz," he said, slowly, "they will come sure; also they'll mob us if you cheat them. But it's done now. There's no way out. If you fail, the club is ruined. What are you going to do?"

"You vill see vat you shall see," replied the other, calmly smoking.

Evans drew a long breath. "All right, Fritz. I say 'noddings', but if I find you have been playing with us, I'll boot you down the main shaft of the mine."

Fritz nodded, quite imperturbed.

Despite a blustering storm, the hall was crowded the night of the concert. Never had the orchestra played better, never had the enthusiasm of the audience been more inspiring. There were two solos only, Ellen Lloyd's and another on the French Horn. Most of the program was orchestral, and running all through the evening was a sense of eager, tense expectancy. All waited for the last, the Largo.

The hall was new and unfamiliar, and to no one did it seem particularly strange that the orchestra should be seated in an unusual manner. The director's stand was at the rear of the stage and the orchestra faced him, with backs to the audience. Behind the director was a drapery of flags.

With the last notes of the "Kaiser March," Evans stepped down from his stand, which was quickly pushed aside. Fritz Liebknecht leaned over and pressed an electric button. A beam of light flashed across the hall on to the draperies, and the other lights went out. Slowly, then, the flags were lowered, and on a white screen, thus revealed, shone the face of their well loved, but departed leader, Tom Marshall.

A brief round of applause followed, and even before it had subsided the picture changed, and before the surprised audience appeared upon the screen the flicker of a motion picture. A rustle and a murmur of voices greeted this, swelling into a perfect roar of applause, as the people recognized Marshall himself, stepping forward and bowing with grave dignity. A moment he seemed to pause and look around. Then, raising his baton, he signaled with the old familiar gesture.

Instantly the instruments were brought in readiness, and then, in response to the baton of their dead leader, burst forth again the clear high harmony of that grand orchestral hymn. From the first note to the last they played it through, looking into the face of the man beside whose open grave they had played this same piece months before. As Ellen Lloyd arose, in answer to his gesture, to play her solo part, the tears were streaming from her eyes, and, as he smiled back into her face, she could scarcely calm herself to play. But she did play, as never before! Then, obedient to his signal, the other instruments took up their parts, each building up a little of the melo-

dious whole, which ends in that last grand chord of harmony. Then silence, and the figure on the screen bowed gravely and laid down his baton. The picture faded. A timid ripple of applause was hushed instantly, and the audience departed as from a church.

"It vas like diss," explained Liebknecht, in the social room. "I go mit him to New York; he see der Herr Professor. He muss to the hospital go, for to be operated. Der Herr Professor say true, 'You may be well, but also maybe you die.' He shall go in the hospital in two days or three days.

"That night ve valk down the Bowery. Ve go in von of dem nickel theatre. Ve see the mofing bictures. He say to me, 'Fritz!' he say, 'I would like dat I haf my bicture taken like dat, for de club. I like dot dey feel I vos not dead, perhaps, ven I iss dead. Ve vill haf dot film taken, Fritz, und you keep it, und some day, perhaps, you make it a surprise. I vill make it dat ve play de Largo.'"

Fritz puffed reminiscently on his meerschaum, and presently continued.

"Vell, ve vent next day to de bicture place und made arrangements. He said: 'Ve vill blay de Largo. Here iss de violins, und here de brasses,' undsoweiter; und he said it all so, und so; und he said 'Here ist Ellen, mit her violin, und hier sie steht ven see play de solo.' Nun! He took hiss baton und, — und, — vell, you haf gesehen! Dass ist alles."

There was silence when he finished. Then Ellen reached for her instrument. The old man turned off the light and all listened while Ellen's violin again sang Tom Marshall's favorite piece. As she finished she wiped her eyes with her kerchief and said,

"We all loved him."

And Fritz answered, "Yah; und ve still haf him mit uns, yess."

Mrs. Bilger's Victory.*

EMMA S. JONES AND GEIK TURNER.

[This story appeared in THE BLACK CAT thirteen years ago and is reprinted by request.]

THE railroad had killed her muley cow, and the railroad had got to pay for it, — so said Mrs. Bilger.

Mrs. Bilger was a widow lady residing in the suburbs of Grafton, on the hills of Southern Pennsylvania. Grafton is not an imposing place. It is situated in a hole in the woods mowed out by the sawmill, which forms its principal industry. The business life in Grafton consists in feeding this sawmill, and, as it is not a large one, the town cannot be called populous even at its centre. The situation of Mrs. Bilger's place, in the outskirts, would have reasonably been called retired if it had not been for the fact that the P. D. & Q. Railroad ran through her front yard. In this way a good proportion of the population of the United States passed through Mrs. Bilger's dooryard. Few, however, stopped, except when some train got stalled at the foot of the grade before her house. The P. D. & Q. engines can climb almost anything but a tree, but occasionally in the winter they had to take two or three starts at this grade; it was the worst on the whole road. Occasionally, also, Mrs. Bilger had calls from railroad men, who stopped to drink at her celebrated spring.

The late Mr. Bilger had left his widow her small house and clearing, an eight-year-old son, a double-barrelled shot-gun, and her muley cow. A few melancholy hens completed the inventory of the estate. Mrs. Bilger, who was a woman of character, made the best of her resources. She herself tickled the shallow surface of her portion of the earth till it burst forth every summer into a sickly grin of scanty potatoes and corn, while her conscientious hens converted the minor by-products of the farm into

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marketable produce. Her main trust, however, had always been put in her muley cow, who had furnished her a good supply of milk, for which she found a ready sale.

This muley cow would probably not have taken a prize on fancy points at a cattle show; still she was a patient, industrious animal, and a good provider. But at last, unfortunately, the extreme scarcity of provisions drove her to night work, and she wandered on to the railroad track and unintentionally ran against a freight train in the dark. In the morning Mrs. Bilger discovered little more than a fine line of Hamburg steak stretching towards the western horizon. It was a particularly hard blow to her, because she was on the eve of accepting a flattering offer of thirteen dollars for the animal.

There was no doubt in Mrs. Bilger's mind from the first that the railroad would have to settle for her cow. So she informed the station agent the very day following the accident, and after protracted negotiations, which nearly lost the station agent his dinner, the latter agreed to forward a demand for settlement to headquarters. Mrs. Bilger didn't see why he couldn't settle for her martyred cow on the spot, but she was willing to make reasonable concessions. Her final price was twenty-three dollars.

So, after awhile, the station agent forwarded her demand to the division superintendent, and after awhile the division superintendent forwarded it to the division claim agent, and after awhile the division claim agent decided he would send out a man to look up the case. A railroad company does not take unnatural haste in settling up the claims of a poor, ignorant widow. This railroad's fatal mistake was that it did not know what kind of a widow it was dealing with.

It took about three weeks in all for the railroad officials to get around to Mrs. Bilger's case, and Mrs. Bilger, deprived of her chief means of sustenance, was becoming somewhat dangerous. She viewed with increasing displeasure the railroad men in general, and especially those who came to get water from her spring.

"Wal, ef they ain't got gall," she was accustomed to say to her Willie in this interval, "killing old muley cow, and then comin' here to get our water."

Finally she decided to give her ultimatum.

"Here, you," she said, when the section hands came up one noon for their daily supply, "you get out of thar. You don't get no more water out of my spring till you pay for my muley cow you killed."

"What muley cow? We ain't killed no muley cow," said the astonished section hands; but it was no use to talk to Mrs. Bilger. The railroad had killed her cow, and to her the section hands constituted a part of one heartless and bloodthirsty corporation, which was responsible. They returned without the water.

The boss, a fat man, who had somewhat of a determined character himself, and who prided himself on his power of invective, was severely sarcastic on their return.

"Gimme that pail, I'll show you how to get the water." He waddled off with the pail in a truly ferocious manner.

Mrs. Bilger was in the house at the time. The section boss walked triumphantly up to the spring and stooped down to take up the water in his pail. The water was some way down in the ground, being confined in a shallow well, walled with stones, and as he was a very fat man, it took him some time to get down to it. Just as he was about to accomplish his purpose he suddenly toppled over head foremost into the spring with the graceful, tilting motion of a mud turtle falling off a log. Mrs. Bilger had waylaid him with her broom.

The section boss was a very close fit for the spring, and he made up his mind several times before he unwedged himself that he was a drowned section boss. When he finally did get out, spluttering and swearing, he found himself looking into the muzzles of a double-barrelled shot-gun, like a pair of opera-glasses. He fled precipitately without his water bucket.

Mrs. Bilger threw the bucket scornfully after him. "I won't take less'n thirty dollars now, cash down," was all she said.

After that it was vain for a railroad man to attempt to use that spring. She watched it most of her spare time herself, and when she didn't she had her boy out. Whenever a railroad man came in sight the child's little piping voice sounded the guard mount, and his mother came on duty with her gun. She didn't say much, but she just walked back and forth before the spring with conscious strength and dignity in her bearing, and deep, hard

lines about her mouth. A great many railroad men who had thought they wanted a drink before they saw her, found that they were mistaken and turned away.

By and by, however, the section boss got tired of this sort of thing. There was a good deal of work that year, raising the tracks on that grade, and there wasn't another spring for two miles. Finally he decided to negotiate with Mrs. Bilger.

"That's right," said Mrs. Bilger, "you killed my cow and you've got to pay for her. She's wuth jest forty dollars."

So the section boss sought out the road master and told him about the affair, and the road master told the division superintendent. It had been so long since the division superintendent had heard from the station master about Mrs. Bilger's cow that he had forgotten all about it. Besides, it didn't sound like the same cow, anyway, the valuation being so different. So the division superintendent filed another report with the claim department.

Mrs. Bilger, not hearing anything from her appeal for justice, frequented the station at Grafton a great deal, coming in about train time and talking violently to the station agent. Finally, the station agent agreed to write on again to the division superintendent. By this time Mrs. Bilger's price was fifty-two dollars.

It so happened at this time that the division superintendent was off on a short vacation, and his substitute, in an excess of zeal, filed the third cow reported with the claim department.

Before it reached there, however, the division claim agent had visited Mrs. Bilger with a check made out for her first asking price of twenty-three dollars.

"Have you lost two cows, Mrs. Bilger?" said he politely.

"No, I hain't," that worthy woman replied, "only one; but I ain't going to take no twenty-three dollars for it. That cow will cost you just sixty-two dollars now."

"But she wasn't worth any sixty-two dollars," he protested.

"Yes she was, too," said Mrs. Bilger; "countin' the time I've lost foolin' over the blame thing the last three months, an' all I've had to pay for butter and cheese, sixty-two dollars 's cheap. Besides, you can pay it just as well as not; you know you've got the money. If you don't, I'll take it to the law."

Mrs. Bilger was obstinate, and the claim agent took back his

check, and, acting on Mrs. Bilger's threat to go to law, sent over the first two papers on the case to the general claims attorney, intending to see him about it next day. Next day he was called off suddenly to another part of the road. While he was gone the second report from the station agent came along, with a bill for fifty dollars for Mrs. Bilger's muley cow, and, the department claim agent being away, was sent straight to the claims attorney. The three bills confused him.

"What the devil are they doing down there," said the claims attorney when the claim agent came back, "having a massacre of muley cows?"

It took the claim agent some time to explain.

In the meantime Mrs. Bilger began to take the bit in her teeth. She now resolved to suspend traffic generally on the road till they paid some attention to her. For this purpose she secured an old red flannel shirt, and hitching it on the end of an axe helve, began to flag all the trains going up the grade industriously.

"You killed my muley cow, and you've got to pay for her," she said, when the trains came to a standstill. "I won't take less'n sixty-seven dollars for her." It is not necessary to state what the train hands said.

The railroad men finally didn't pay any attention to her red flag at all, so far as stopping went, but as nobody knew just when she might decide to do something serious, like piling up a stone wall on the track, for instance, they watched that flag with considerable curiosity.

And at last she did decide to do something. It was one Tuesday night. She put the boy to bed early; then she prepared for action.

Filling two buckets from the half barrel of soft soap always kept on tap, and taking a bucket in each hand, Mrs. Bilger started out into the dark, and walked half a mile up the grade. Then she artistically applied her soft soap to about a quarter of a mile of the track.

The next train was a freight due from the east about nine o'clock. She was late that night, and she came down that grade for all she knew how. When she struck that soft soap she slid ahead like a comet rollicking through space; the engine rocked

from side to side like a steam launch in a storm. The engineer saw there was something wrong in a minute, and whistled "down brakes" ferociously. The brakemen put on enough power on the brakes to lift her right off the tracks and hold her suspended in the air, but she just plunged ahead through the darkness, squirting soft soap on all the surrounding landscape.

"It's that damned Bilger woman again!" yelled the engineer to the fireman. "What's she done now?"

"Oh, my God!" said the fireman, thinking of his family; "how do I know?"

Then they both held on to the sides of the reeling cab and hoped hard. The engineer swore arpeggios to a sort of running obligato on the whistle. The train went by the station like a demoniac steam calliope escaped from a circus, with a frightened train hand hanging on the brake of every other car. When they finally stopped, two miles down the road, the engineer said he never had such an awful feeling in his life,— only he didn't say it that way. The fireman was quite seasick.

The worst of it was, they didn't have the least idea what ailed them, because by that time all the soft soap was worn off the wheels. They hadn't the time to look around, anyway, because they had to get down on the next siding for the through ten o'clock passenger train.

The express was extra heavy that night, and the engineer had a horrible rate of speed on her when she reached the grade. Nevertheless, when she struck it she stopped short within two lengths. To the wild dismay of the engineer, the big drivers of his engine just whirled around and around like a top. The engine couldn't get up that grade any more than a man can lift himself by his boot straps. Finally the engineer stopped her, and he and the fireman got out to investigate. Up the grade in front of the engine the rails, in the beams of the headlight, stretched in two strangely glistening lines.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the fireman, stooping down; "it's soft soap."

"Now will you pay me for my muley cow?" said a voice from the darkness. "If you don't, you'll never run your darned road again."

It was Mrs. Bilger. Her price had risen to eighty-seven dollars.

It so happened that a very important person was on this train, no less important a person, in fact, than the president of the road. He was in a hurry, too, and he came out of his special car to see what was going on, just as Mrs. Bilger arrived on the scene.

"Well, what's the matter here?" said the president.

"Soft soap, sir," said the excited engineer; this woman's been daubing up the track with soft soap so we can't run the train, because she had her darned cow killed and they won't pay for it."

"Yes, they will," said Mrs. Bilger; "and it'll cost 'em eighty-seven dollars,— not a cent less."

Mrs. Bilger felt she was in a position to dictate, and she proposed to do so. The railroad president appreciated the situation.

"Well, my good woman," said he, "don't you think you'd compromise for a little less — say seventy-five?"

"Who are you?" said Mrs. Bilger haughtily.

"Well, I'm president of this road," said the great official.

"Well, then, I want eighty-seven dollars for my muley cow," said Mrs. Bilger, "and you don't get her for any less."

This amused the president considerably. He took out his fat pocket-book and counted out a big roll of bills. "There you are," said he, "I'll pay it myself." Then he got Mrs. Bilger's mark on a receipt before witnesses, in front of the headlight; and the muley cow was settled for just five months after its death.

After awhile, with the help of the freight engine below, the passenger train was pushed up the grade, the track having been sanded all the way up.

"That muley cow was a good paying property," mused the railroad president, as he seated himself in his special car. "If she'd given a barrel of milk a day, and had a calf every two months since the time of her demise, she wouldn't have yielded such large returns."

A Cupid from Prison.*

BY DAVID BRUCE FITZGERALD.

PELHAM SWAIN — millionaire by inheritance, artist by preference, discoverer of a new thing in decorative pottery, and engaged to the most imperious, most fascinating, most bewildering second-year-out girl of his set — had never in all his twenty-eight years received such a blow as that curt note of dismissal gave him. It ran:

542 E Street, February the third.

MY DEAR SIR:

I release you unconditionally from your engagement to me; and I return, by the messenger who carries this, all such gifts of yours as are in my possession. As our betrothal has never been formally announced neither of us will be under necessity of making explanations. It will be useless for you to call, or to address any communication to me, as Mother and I expect to leave to-morrow morning for a tour of Mexico. Your own memory will furnish you the reason for this dismissal.

Very truly yours,

To Mr. Pelham Swain. VERONICA VERNAL.

The artist pushed aside the accompanying package, lighted a cigar and set himself to think. He grasped at a hundred clues, only to find them alike in their failure to bring him to the light. He had been Veronica's true and steadfast lover. The girl had, to be sure, displayed an unaccountable capriciousness of late — but he had not dreamed that she was seriously offended, nor could his memory furnish him the reason for her displeasure. At last, wearied by the futility of the effort to understand, he gave the case up, and found himself perilously near the edge of that precipice men call "Despair."

Pelham Swain, some two weeks later, wandered, rather than directed himself, to the home of Miss Alicia Carlin. Rumor had once associated their names; therefore, being merely good

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friends, they had seen each other less frequently thereafter. Now the artist was vaguely aware that he owed Alicia a party call. Also he was interested in the welfare of Henry Tort, who, after a bad battering in a runaway, had gone cruising in search of health and was somewhere off the South American coast. Miss Carlin, if she would confess it, might have late advices of Tort's condition.

Swain was shown to the library, where his hostess laid down a magazine to welcome him. The talk ran, for a time, along conventional lines. Miss Carlin diverted it to personalities.

"Mr. Swain," she said, "Mr. Tort —"

"Precisely!" The artist managed to make the interruption significant.

"Really, you are wasting your ingenuity," returned Alicia. "It is no secret. Henry and I are to be married almost at once after his return, which will be in about six weeks. He writes that his health is quite restored."

"I wish you both every happiness in the world," said Swain, with a heartiness which left no doubt of his sincerity. "Tort is a fortunate man. I was once tempted to try conclusions with him; and, if it had not been —"

"For Veronica Vernal?" It was Miss Carlin's turn to be insinuating.

"No — that I saw my running would be hopeless."

"The Vernals must have decided on a Mexican tour very suddenly," said Alicia, bent on pursuing the subject. "Veronica was here only two days before, and she never mentioned their going. I think it was the queerest thing."

"I fancy they surprised a number of people by the suddenness of their departure," assented Swain. "I am sure, though, that Miss Vernal has had that trip in contemplation for quite a while."

He did not add that he and Veronica had planned it as their wedding journey.

"Oh," cried Miss Carlin, suddenly recalling the point from which the conversation had strayed, "what I wanted to tell you was that Henry, the day he sailed, sent me a vase, which I would like you to see. I know nothing of pottery, but you are an expert

and can tell me all about it. Please come into the drawing-room and turn up the gas."

Swain complied, and, to his immense astonishment, found himself looking at a wonderful Dionysian amphora, the first and finest speciment of his own work, which, months before, he had presented to Veronica Vernal. There could be no possible mistake. He knew it, as a father knows his child. No other bit of pottery in the world was exactly like it. That iridescent effect — that strange luminosity, indefinable in words — those shifting striations, half hiding, half revealing the glow of a deeper, golden fire — those shining particles, swimming in an intense, elusive brown and seeming to gather themselves into the pupils of hungry, carnivorous eyes — had he not thought all these things out? And there — he looked at the bottom of the vase — was his private mark.

The artist's thoughts traversed, in a flash, the entire history of the thing in his hands. Because he loved her, even better than his art, he had laid this, the first-fruits of his labors, at Veronica Vernal's feet. She — as she told him — had enshrined it on a pedestal in the corner of her boudoir, and had drawn a red cord from wall to wall, cutting off the corner, lest it should suffer from the carelessness of servants. Later, wishing to make a minute comparison between it and some other specimens yielded up by his furnace, he had borrowed the vase for three days, and had duly returned it.

Swain's first impulse was to speak these facts out bluntly and, as Veronica's representative, claim the vase; but he allowed the moment in which he might have done this to pass. Afterward, a jumble of second thoughts kept him silent. What right had he now, more than another, to act in Veronica's behalf? Then, Miss Carlin had said, with evident sincerity, that her lover gave her the amphora. This was probably — was certainly — a mistake; but, until Tort returned and assured her of her error, she would never resign its possession.

The artist, with these thoughts thronging his mind, made a pretence of subjecting the vase to a careful and critical examination.

"A — er — remarkably beautiful specimen," he muttered.

"The — er — glaze seems to be — er — unusually transparent. Made in this country, if I may — er — guess."

Alicia, whose thoughts were far enough from Pelham Swain, did not notice the paucity and incoherence of his remarks. She was a little disappointed that he saw nothing in the vase to arouse enthusiasm; but in five minutes, chattering away on the theme of Henry Tort, she forgot this superficial hurt.

Swain, back in his apartment, had a moment of clear vision. He knew now why Veronica had dismissed him. The borrowed vase had gone astray, and she had interpreted its failure to reappear as an intimation. Finally, seeing it on the Carlin mantel, she had concluded that he had given it to Alicia.

The artist touched a button.

"William," he said to the brass-bedecked youth who responded, "do you recall the fact that, some weeks ago, I sent you to deliver a large pasteboard box at 542 E Street?"

"Like it was yesterday," replied the boy; "only it was B Street. I handed it in to a cross-eyed girl, with red hair; and I got down the steps pretty quick, for fear she would hoodoo me."

"But, William, I wrote the address on a slip and told you to paste it on the lid of the box. Did you do that?"

"Nope — I couldn't find any paste, so I put the slip in my pocket."

"Let me see it."

"I guess it's lost," said the boy, after a prolonged search.

Swain dismissed William with a gesture. He saw precisely how the mistake had occurred and that it was largely due to his own carelessness. The homes of the two girls, though in different streets, bore the same number. The vase, in an unaddressed package, had been handed in at the Carlin residence. Alicia had supposed, on conjectural grounds, that it came from Tort; had, indeed, confidently affirmed it.

The artist, after traversing, as it seemed to him, an interminable labyrinth, arrived at some tolerably lucid conclusions. It would be unpardonably stupid to allow the happiness of his life to be undermined by a mere perversity of fate. Again, he would be at a distinct advantage if Miss Vernal, when she came home, should find the vase standing in its accustomed

place in her boudoir. Swain could not overlook the fact that his fiancée had declined to give him a chance to justify himself. The first overture toward a reconciliation should therefore, as his pride told him, come from Veronica. But this were a vain expectation so long as the amphora was in Miss Carlin's home and Miss Vernal remained ignorant of the mistake which carried it there.

The man formulated a dozen plans, only to abandon them as impracticable. An appeal to Alicia seemed the only recourse — but it was quite certain that she would not resign the vase until Tort returned and explained. When Tort did return it would probably be too late. It was a plainly hopeless situation.

One morning, as he was reviewing the whole case for perhaps the thousandth time, an obscure paragraph in the newspaper caught Swain's eye. He read it twice, then cut it out and put it in his pocket.

"At five minutes before twelve to-night," it ran, "the portal of the State Prison, located in the outskirts of the city, will open for the exit of 'Cully the Crook,' one of the most daring and expert housebreakers in the country. Cully is wanted, for various burglaries, in half a dozen states; but, as he is finishing a ten-year term and it might be difficult to collect the evidence against him, he will probably be allowed his freedom."

The artist spent the day wrestling with conscience and fear; and conquered them, as a desperate man will. After dinner, with a slouch hat drawn down to his eyes, he walked over to the east side of the city and hailed a cab. Two hours past midnight he returned to his apartments, accompanied by a small, pale-faced man, who was clad in a cheap brown suit and who shuffled as he walked.

When sundry viands had been disposed of and a box of cigars opened, a long conversation ensued. It was conducted mostly in whispers, for the walls of apartment houses are sometimes thin. Swain drew several diagrams on bits of paper, which he exhibited to his companion and then destroyed. He also displayed a roll of bills, detaching a couple of them and pushing them across the table.

Just before dawn, Cully the Crook departed, wearing a storm-coat, which fell almost to his heels. He was absent a little less than forty-eight hours.

"I've got the chiny jug," said the burglar, when the artist had admitted him. "The job was a dead snap. Could ha' picked any lock in the house with a pitchfork. Plenty of good loot lyin' loose in all directions, but I remembered what you said and didn't lift so much as a burnt match, savin' the vase."

Swain removed the wrappings of the parcel which Cully drew from the depths of his voluminous ulster and found the amphora. After a single glance, he replaced the paper about it. He did not propose to retain the vase longer than was necessary.

Then the artist, much to Cully the Crook's disgust, declared his intention of playing a personal part in the second half of the scheme for replacement. Swain had several reasons. The burglar, once inside the Vernal house, might not realize the importance of setting the vase in a particular place. Also, the empty pedestal stood in Veronica's boudoir; and there were sentimental objections to the profanation of that room by the presence in it of such a character as the ex-convict.

"Well, let's pull it off now," said Cully, after a vain attempt to combat his employer's determination. "It's three hours to daylight and rainin' like a washwoman emptyin' tubs. If the house is empty, as you say, there won't be a bit of trouble. Only, you must do what I tell you."

Swain, obeying the burglar's whispered instructions, rode in cabs and ran through alleys, he walked boldly past policemen and dodged into dark doorways, he crouched under doorsteps and climbed back fences. The darkness, the turnings, the rain beating in his face, the necessity of preserving the amphora intact bewildered him; and when, at last, he found himself in a musty cellar he could not, for his life, have told how he came there or whose it was.

Cully the Crook was perfectly self-possessed. He opened the slide of a dark lantern, threw a pencil of light on the stairs and boldly ascended, Swain following. Lock after lock yielded to the burglar's swift dexterity. In the hall the artist recognized several objects and knew he was in the Vernal house. Outside

Veronica's boudoir he told his agent to wait. He entered himself and placed the amphora on the pedestal in the corner. Then the two retired as they had come, carefully locking the doors.

"Now, Cully," said the artist, when they had regained his quarters, "here is the last instalment of the five hundred I promised you. Have you ever felt a desire to go West?"

"You bet," returned the burglar. "The East is a bit too small for me."

"Well, in this envelope there is a ticket to San Francisco. It is yours on one condition — that you write a letter at my dictation."

"'Tain't safe, gov'nor. I'm an older hand than you and I tell you it's risky to put things on paper."

"Are the police acquainted with your handwriting?"

"No, I can't say as they are, seein' as I never wrote but two letters in my life and them to my sister in Jersey."

"Then there is absolutely no danger. I promise not to mail the letter until after you arrive in San Francisco."

Cully, with the air of one violating a sacred tradition, finally consented to do the rash thing his employer wished. Swain produced some cheap paper, purchased at a small shop, and, with considerable effort, the burglar managed to set down the sentences suggested by the artist. Swain was careful not to dictate.

"W'at name?" asked the writer, when the body of the letter was finished.

"Invent one. Bill Jones will do as well as another."

"How does Jim Tom Parsons strike you?"

"First-rate — put it down."

Cully, with a cunning leer, appended the name. The artist fancied that Jim Tom Parsons had, in some way, incurred the ex-convict's displeasure.

"That is all," said Swain, when the letter, in a directed envelope, had been locked away in a drawer.

"I don't tumble to your lay, gov'nor," remarked Cully, rising, "but that's your business. You wanted the chiny jug moved. I wanted the five hundred greens. I gave you a square deal. Shake!"

He extended his hand. The artist, with some concealed reluctance, took it.

Pelham Swain gave himself up to fancies — humorous and otherwise. Veronica would certainly stare when, on her return, she found the amphora in its accustomed place. But — could he anticipate her procedure? She might send the vase to him, unaccompanied by any explanation. That, however, would leave her curious and bewildered, therefore she would not do this. More probably, she would apply to him for enlightenment. That would give him an opportunity to bring the episode to a satisfactory ending.

When Veronica Vernal, a month later, came home, her surprise was as unbounded as Swain could have wished. She lifted the amphora, identified it, then sat down and gazed at it in stupefaction. Was that bit of porcelain enchanted? She could think of no other way to account for its mysterious migrations. Had she done her lover a great injustice? Over and over again she reviewed all the circumstances and could make nothing of them, save that the vase was there on its pedestal, precisely where it should be. There was something beyond this obvious fact — what? Only a maze of puzzling, and therefore irritating, conjectures. She seized her hat and coat; fresh air was a necessity. Her footsteps tended — as Swain probably anticipated they would — directly to the home of Alicia Carlin. It had occurred to Veronica that there might be two precisely similar vases in existence.

The moment Miss Vernal noted that the amphora had been removed from the Carlin mantel she regained full possession of all her faculties. Therefore, when her hostess appeared, Veronica promptly began to recount the interesting incidents connected with her tour of Mexico; not doubting that Alicia, when her turn came, would refer to the disappearance of the vase. Nor was she disappointed. Miss Carlin, almost as soon as a chance offered, spoke of the robbery which had occurred during her friend's absence from town and of the fact that nothing had been taken except a unique and valuable bit of porcelain. Veronica, on the occasion of her last call, had possibly noticed it?

Miss Vernal considered — but could not quite recall it.

"I prized it particularly," Alicia continued, "because, as I supposed, Henry — Mr. Tort — gave it to me. Of course, you have heard —"

"Everything is news to me," replied Veronica, feeling that her head was on the point of beginning to whirl again.

"We have had an understanding for nearly a year, but, after that dreadful accident, Henry would not hear to making the engagement public until he had recovered. He has just returned from his voyage perfectly restored; and we are telling our friends. Indeed, we are to be married almost immediately."

"It's the strangest thing, though, about that vase." Alicia went on to say, when the flutter aroused by her announcement had somewhat subsided. "The morning Henry sailed he hinted that I might expect to receive a little present after he had gone. That evening a box, containing a beautiful piece of pottery, came to the house. I took for granted he had sent it; and in my first letter I thanked him for the gift, without expressly mentioning its character. Now, Henry says he never saw or heard of the vase; that he intended to send me a brooch. In his hurry to make the vessel by sailing time he gave the order to an inexperienced clerk, who stupidly forgot or mislaid my address; so the people at the store, not knowing what else to do, concluded to hold the brooch until inquiries should be made."

"But the address on the box?" asked Veronica, with all the indifference she could assume.

"It bore none, and was certainly sent here by mistake. But isn't it strange that the burglar should have taken the vase and left the silver?"

"Why, that reminds me," cried Veronica, apparently recalling an incident which, at the time of its occurrence, had made but a slight impression on her mind. "I have a story about a vase, too; one quite as strange as yours. Some weeks before I went away I loaned a Dionysian amphora, a very fine specimen of a new thing in pottery, to a friend. I remember now that up to the time of my departure it had not been returned, yet, when I entered my rooms this morning, it was standing where I always kept it, on a pedestal in the corner of my boudoir. What do you think of that? — and the house closed during our absence."

"Are you certain it was not sent back before you went away?" Alicia asked.

"Ah! You want to spoil my story by making it only a piece of forgetfulness. One's memory does play strange tricks with one sometimes. Yet, I am almost sure that —"

Miss Carlin declined to admit that Miss Vernal's story was in the class with her own. The circumstance was so easily explicable.

Veronica returned home deeply dissatisfied with herself. She could not put away the thought that she had acted hastily in breaking her engagement. Alicia Carlin's account of how the vase came to her almost completely exonerated Pelham Swain; and he could probably explain everything. Should she offer him the opportunity? Pride and apprehension said "No." The man, stung by a sense of the wrong done him, might spurn her advances. Curiosity and reviving love said "Yes." If Swain's protestations had been sincere he would overlook the hurt she had given him. The mental struggle of a woman to anticipate what a man will do is akin to physical agony. Then, if the outcome proves her wrong, she pretends never to have given the subject even a momentary consideration. If her conclusion is verified by the man's subsequent conduct she smilingly refers to "a woman's intuition." This is part of the play.

Miss Vernal, that night, lay staring at the ceiling of her room until the darkness softened to gray shadows and she became aware that another day had dawned. The light seemed to bring her clearness of inward, as well as outward, vision. Very quietly, but with a precision of movement which indicated that doubt had fled, she arose, dressed, wrote a line or two to Pelham Swain, went softly down-stairs, slipped out of the front door to the street and dropped the note in a neighboring mail box. Then, returning to her room, she threw herself on a couch, drew a soft slumber robe about her and slept serenely until her maid informed her of a waiting breakfast.

When Swain, that afternoon, received a written invitation to call at Miss Vernal's home — to explain something which greatly puzzled her and upon which only he could throw light — a triumphant smile lighted his face. Yet he did not display the alac-

rity which might have been expected. Much reflection had brought him to a knowledge of the virtue which lies in slow movement. The artist, after a careful examination of Veronica's note, finished the novel he was reading, dressed, dined at his club and took a long walk, which led him to the lower and, finally, disreputable part of the city. Here he posted a letter. Then, seeming to have no further business in that quarter, he returned to his rooms; where, with impatient resolution, he waited for the machinery of the postal system to revolve. He had calculated everything — even the value of the postmark of a down-town station on the envelope which contained Cully the Crook's laboriously written epistle.

Swain did not make the mistake of regarding Veronica's note merely as a summons to appear as a witness. On the other hand, there was nothing in its tone to suggest that he might safely don the ermine of a judge and decide the case as he pleased. He resolved, therefore, to take and maintain the attitude of awaiting developments. He would know nothing beyond the fact of his peremptory dismissal, save as Veronica might enlighten him.

Miss Vernal received her caller with that formal cordiality which may mean much or nothing. Her face was flushed and her hand, as Swain noticed, very cold — but these might be indications merely of excitement. The artist seated himself and remarked that his hostess had been away.

"Yes," said Veronica, "we are just home, but in the short time since my return I have learned of some remarkable circumstances. Please read this — aloud. It seems almost incredible; yet I believe the writer has told nothing but the truth."

She handed Swain the burglar's letter. The young man drew the blotted page from the envelope and, in the slow, puzzled manner of one who deciphers doubtful chirography, read:

MISS VERRONICKY VURNUL
542 E streat citty

DEER MISS

One nite I cracked a crib in B streat. While I was lookin at a purty two handed chiny jug in the parler I hears sumbudy comin down stairs. I scooted carryin the jug with me. Not wantin to luze the nite I went over to E streat and cracked your house. Thinks I lle begin at the top this time. This was seein as your house was empty. So I goes up stairs to your room. I node it was your room because havin litterrary likes I picked up a

book havin your name writ in the frunt of it. After readin a little I turned a glim on the jug. I seen as no fence in town would give a plunk for it. So I set it on a little round stand in the corner. Jest as I was gittin ready to go to work I hears a cop whissel in frunt of the house. I slid down to the bacement in a hurry and skipt out. Before makin my getaway I stopt to look around and it was then I locked the door. I dont reely want the chiny jug only the salvashun army has got me and Im tryin to be a better man. Lots of the things Ive swiped I cant send back to them as owns em but I rite these few lines to ask you kindly if you dont want the jug to send it to the gent as lives at 542 B streat. That was the first crib I cracked that nite. If its too much trubble to send the jug sit it inside the ally gait the nite of the first ful moon and Ile send for it. Hopin you are well and all your relashuns

Your true frend
JIM TOM PARSONS.

"Did you ever hear of anything so extraordinary," Miss Vernal asked, as Swain finished spelling out the epistle.

"A very remarkable production, certainly. But — what is it all about? A little china jug appears —"

"It's the vase you gave me — the Dionysian amphora," Veronica cried.

Swain's countenance was a study in hopeless bewilderment.

"The amphora! I sent it back to you three days after I borrowed it."

"But it never arrived — and I afterward saw it on Alicia Carlin's mantel."

"So that was the reason — ?" The man's voice was very grave; reproachfully so. "It was probably owing to an error on the part of the messenger. Do you not think, Miss Ver — Veronica — you should have told me?"

"I — I — Oh, I thought such horrid things — Pelham," the girl stammered, with averted face and tell-tale catches in her voice. I don't know why I was so foolish. Can you — will you not overlook — ?"

Swain, taking her in his arms, told her, to the length of forty minutes, that he could and would. Out of the inarticulateness of their conversation only a couple of broken sentences emerged.

"Oh, that blessed burglar!" This from Veronica.

"Yes, dearest; we have reason to be grateful to Cul — er — what's his name? — Jim Tom Parsons." This from Swain.

When Miss Alicia Carlin, on the following morning, read Jim

Tom Parsons' letter and, by slow degrees, grasped the situation. her amazement was profound.

"Just to think, dear," she said to Veronica, "that your story and mine were really halves of the same story. If the thing had not actually happened I would never have believed it possible. I am thoroughly convinced that there are occult powers at work in this world and that they had something to do with the return of your vase."

Veronica agreed that the circumstances were inexplicable on any other hypothesis.

Mr. and Mrs. Pelham Swain and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tort are on terms of great intimacy and often dine at each other's homes. At these dinners the young wives find, in the travels of the Dionysian amphora and the marvelous interference of that unknown personality, Jim Tom Parsons, unending subjects for conversation and wonder. Swain, long ago, under pledge of eternal secrecy, let Tort into the mystery of the whole affair — and the two men often manage, by gravely citing real and imaginary coincidences of a remarkable kind, to carry conjecture to unheard of lengths. Afterward, up-stairs, they indulge in laughter of a stealthy, unpenetrating quality; and the wives cannot understand why their husbands' waistcoats often show round, white marks, such as might suggest, were it possible to imagine proceedings of that undignified character, that the two men had poked at each other with the chalked ends of billiard cues.

Pelham Swain — in spite of holding himself the most justifiable, least suspected, best rewarded of criminals — has his fears. One of these is that he may sometime talk in his sleep. Another is that Mrs. Henry Tort may ask him why, on a certain occasion, he failed to recognize his own work. He has an explanation ready; but, in all probability, will never be required to give it. Mrs. Tort is one of those comfortable, considerate persons who make wide allowances — especially for the abstraction of a genius, who has a sweetheart, several thousand miles away, to occupy his thoughts.

Angel.*

BY PAUL J. FAIR.

THEY walked their ponies, for it was hot — hot even for New Mexico. The stage road lay white and heavy with the alkali dust, and in the distance the heat made it writhe and dance serpent-like. The mountains to the south seemed unreal, and wavered indistinctly as the hot dust-laden currents pulsated in the intervening space. Horned toads squatted in the brassy glare, only to scuttle back into the breathless blue shadows that the scattering sage-brush cast. Once a rattlesnake's metallic warning sounded hollowly, and the ponies edged gingerly to one side from where the reptile had coiled itself in the road.

One of the ponies lagged a few steps behind the other. He was a typical cow-pony, thin, ewe-necked, cat-hammed, and of an unnameable color, perhaps more of a buckskin than anything else. The hands had rounded up a herd of wild mustangs in the foothills, and after each of the men had taken his pick, Angel had chosen this beast, and the rest were shot, for they would have been troublesome with the saddle herd.

"Diablo" he had been named; "for," as Angel explained, "he shore has wicked intentions; an' besides I need somethin' like thet to sorta even things, seein' ez how yu gents hev afflicted me with a title-page that's some awk'ard to do the right thing by." So the word went around through the camps that the Cross-Y outfit had both an angel and a devil in its makeup, and the angel could weather the worst storms that the devil could concoct.

Except for his grin, Angel's outward appearance did not warrant his christening. It was a broad, leathery grin that creased his face with folds and wrinkles innumerable, and loudly bespoke a good nature. A pair of slits in the upper border of the leather

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served as eyes. They looked forward into the horizon, with the level gaze of the plains. Sandy hair, bleached to a dusty straw-color around the neck, was covered by a floppy sombrero. A thong run through a series of holes in the brim restrained its flappings somewhat. Around his throat, a gorgeous handkerchief of scarlet silk hung limply knotted, while a patched flannel shirt, and a pair of chaps, covered with black angora fur, worn and moth-eaten in spots, hung together over a body that was much too small for them. A greasy belt, in which a few cartridges were stuck here and there, slanted around his waist, sagging at the right hip with the weight of a pistol. His bow-legs curved to his pony's sides, and the high heels of his boots were all that prevented his inward-pointing feet from being thrust entirely through the stirrups.

Angel had drifted into the camp one fall during the rodeo, and asked the foreman for work. That official, pointing out a horse, told him to cut out a steer from the herd in the corral, and see how long it would take him to tie it. The men winked at one another, and stood aside with imperturbable faces, while Angel roped the horse, saddled it, and swung quickly on its back.

For a moment the horse stood hump-backed and quivering, then, with a squeal, he reared, and jumped stiff-legged in the air. Down he came with a twisting, bone-racking jolt. His legs were as rods of stiff whalebone, that sprung and stiffened, as he jumped and struck the ground, with seemingly no time for recovery.

Blank surprise came over Angel's face. Then the smile spread out its wrinkles again. He understood. When the horse was tired he jumped off, and after unsaddling, looked at the foreman, still grinning broadly.

"Well?" he queried.

The foreman squinted at him quizzically for a moment, then exploded in volcanic mirth.

The outfit echoed him.

"We've shore got 'n angel among us now. The pore deluded son-of-a-gun has got locoed, and fell through while he was frolickin' 'round on the heavenly stock range. Yu're name will be Angel if yu ride with the saints on the Cross-Y."

Thus was he christened, and unasked he had sworn allegiance

to the foreman. Hadn't the boss given him a good job? That seemed to offset any possible wrongs in Angel's mind. What if he was used as the unscrupulous mind of the foreman dictated? More than a few times could he have shown the marks of superfluous energy, on the part of his employer, when the latter had taken too much whiskey for the good of his never certain temper. Once, indeed, an attempt as peacemaker resulted in a bullet from the foreman's gun nearly ending the puncher's career, and with a broken shoulder, he was laid up for a while to mend.

"No matter," reasoned Angel; "he come awful near spongin' up the bar, an' when he does that he gets some near-sighted and didn't know me. Besides, he set 'em up twict that day."

Now the foreman was to be married, and the Angel was going to town with him to bring back his horse, while the foreman would return with his bride a week later on the stage.

"The boss' girl," they called her intimately, when they heard of the approaching event, although it was only hearsay that they knew her. She lived at Nogales, and he had met her there when the last stock had been shipped. The adobe ranch house had been newly whitewashed, and sundry repairs made around it, filling the simple cowboys with awe and apprehension.

Angel was appealed to for information, and readily he told them all he knew, and more, for, as he confided, he felt "almost as if he was a pardner with the boss."

They fell upon him bodily, and made all manner of sport.

"Yu're too plumb joovenile appearin' to think about goin' double."

"Thirty ain't joovenile!" he retorted hotly.

"Thirty! Yu can't tell how old yu air, sinct the boss seen fit to remove yer front teeth. Lord, angels don't get born anyway — they jus' happen. I'll bet yu can't rec'llect anything that 'ud own up to bein' parent to yu."

He grinned and shook his head, while the bunk-house trembled with their joy. Thus it was always, and intrenched with good nature and an impregnable smile Angel held his own.

They were riding slowly, for it was hot, and said little. The foreman was uncomfortable in his store clothes, and occasionally swore at the landscape in general and Angel in particular. It was

his only method of keeping cool, and Angel didn't object. But the foreman didn't think of that, and it would have made no difference if he had. Angel deserved to be cursed for being comfortable, and Angel's good humor angered him the more.

At last they arrived in town and stopped, and the foreman, untying the bundle of clothes from the back of his saddle, handed the lead rope to Angel.

"Yu finish inveiglin' that rancho into a respectable look before I get back, or the kiyotes 'll be havin' a *fiesta* with your carcass, *Sabe?* Now *vamos.*" He turned away toward the door of a low wooden building, whose glaring sign proclaimed it to be "The Stockman's Oasis."

"Hey!" called Angel, and he turned impatiently, "look out fer thet Yaqui buck, Red Juan, when yu come back. I heerd they chased him up this way out'n Sonora."

"Yu chicken-livered burro! Do yu reckon any scared-out Injun cavortin' round th' landscape is goin' to make me travel in boiler-plate?" yelled the foreman, as a whiff from the open door of the saloon struck him, and he disappeared.

"The boss mighta given me a drink, too, seein' he's goin' to be married," Angel told himself aloud. Then he started back hurriedly, for it was late, and the ranch was a long way from town. He would have many things to attend to in the week of the foreman's absence, and they would keep him busy.

Then, when the week had gone, and the next day would bring the foreman, grave fears dawned in Angel's mind. A passing cowpuncher told him that a couple of Mexicans had seen Red Juan two days before, in a cañon only thirty miles to the south. What if the outlaw should try to hold up the stage — tomorrow? The foreman would come on that stage — and bring his girl. Fear dazed him for an instant, fear that his boss would come to harm.

Slowly, for Angel's mind never operated otherwise, a plan unfolded itself. He would go down to where the road skirted a lone mesa, where, if at any place, the Indian would be likely to attempt holding up the stage. He would go there early in the morning, long before daylight, and hide himself among the rimrock and watch. If Red Juan came he could pick him off easily

from above. That seemed simple enough. No, he would say nothing about it, then he would get the reward himself. The more he thought about it, the more pleased he became with the scheme. If he did that, perhaps the men wouldn't make fun of him so much, and then, too, he would be helping the foreman out of a mess just when he ought not to be in one. That was the principal thing, anyway.

So he borrowed the cook's Winchester rifle, and made it known that he was going after an antelope, for the proper reception of the boss' girl. They told him he had better be careful or the boss would be jealous. Jealous of Angel — their mirth grew huge at the idea.

He started early, far earlier than was necessary for antelope, and they cursed him for waking them, when he fell over a chair. But it was Angel's way, they muttered, and turned over and fell asleep again.

Riding Diablo down to the mesa, he tied him in a deep arroyo at one side, then started to climb to the top. It was hard work, for he was unused to climbing on foot, and the slope was steep, and not only washed into many gullies, but had patches of cactus growing upon it. Once he loosened a rock slide, and tumbled and slid for a hundred feet, scraping and clawing vainly for a hold. He was tired when at last he found a hiding place at the edge, under a sage bush and between two great rocks. Here he could see everything below him, on the road, and on the rough side of the mesa between.

Lame and bruised from the fall he had received in the slide, he stretched full length on a rock, and closed his eyes to rest. It was still early, an hour before it would be light enough to see. He dozed for a few minutes, then caught himself, almost frightened, then dozed off again and again. It grew light, and he arranged his position so that he could watch and not be cramped. He threw down the lever of his rifle a little, and looked in to see that there was a cartridge in the chamber, then set the hammer at half-cock.

A noise of a rock, dislodged, and falling, bounding, and clattering down, made him look, and from a projecting shoulder stole an Indian. Instantly Angel knew who it was. His muscles

tightened, almost with a jerk, and he cocked his rifle softly, pressing back the trigger to keep it from clicking audibly. He would shoot when the Indian passed just below. No, it would be better to wait until he stopped — then he would be sure. Rapidly the outlaw climbed down the slope, twice stopping to look down the road that strung out into the distance beneath, where, away off toward the town, a little crawling dust-cloud marked the stage's progress. He crouched down on a big rock, about two hundred feet above the road, and almost directly below where the cow-puncher was watching.

Softly Angel brought the rifle to his shoulder, resting the barrel on the edge of the rock. A feeling of savage joy seized him, an alien spirit, and his eyes glinted dully, as he glanced down the sights. This would save the boss from an ugly affair, and it was worth anything to do that. Then he pressed the trigger.

The finger-lever snapped down and back, but it was unnecessary. A white and dusky mass sprawled into a crevice behind the rock and out of sight. He turned away. Now that the work was done, he was sick of it. He would wait here until the stage had passed, before going back to the ranch, for this was nothing for a woman to know about, especially the foreman's girl.

Slowly the dust-cloud grew nearer and larger. Then he made out two men on the box, one the driver, of course, and the other, as they were almost abreast of him, he recognized as the foreman, and it pleased him. But he had a rifle, and they kept looking at the slopes before them. They too, then, must have heard of Red Juan.

"That was jus' like the boss to come, anyhow. He has nerve shore," thought Angel admiringly. But there was no need of worrying over Red Juan, for Juan was lying down there on the slope. He couldn't do any harm now. Angel smiled at the thought, and drew himself up a little to get a better view, for he wanted a glimpse of the bride through the stage window. The movement caught the eyes of the men on the box, and, like light, the rifle came up and cracked.

The foreman saw a body rise and fall outward over the edge, and hang there, a red cloth tied around the head. Again and again he fired, for he wanted to make sure. The bride screamed,

and the horses leaped wildly. Then the foreman and the driver jumped down, and worked their way in slow zig-zags up the side of the mesa.

The foreman reached the second body first, and raised the head.

"Hell!" The word came like a pistol shot, as he recognized the face, and a momentary wave of pity swept over him. Then pity changed to disgust — annoyed disgust. "He never did have a bit of sense. Look how he tied that rag 'round his head — jus' like an Injun! Dam' little fool! But *he* never woulda learned."

The Keeper of the 13th Door.*

BY J. S. WOODHOUSE.

THIS is a story of life beyond the crisis. Most narratives end when the enemy is foiled, the lovers joined in happy unison. This is a tale of the juggling by fate after love is dead and only pride, jealousy and revenge survive as predominating passions.

Not that those of whom I speak never had a romance. Indeed theirs was one of the romantic time. It happened during the Civil War. It was the old story of two youths loving a maiden, young, beautiful, and virtuous. The one — sincere, self-denying, patriotic — had gone to war and thus consumed that time of life which ordinarily fits man for his future career. The other — crafty, mercenary, and selfish — had remained at home, preferring the siege of a heart to the siege of a fortress, and by diligence and thrift secured such a financial start as to make him a formidable rival. But when news of the victory swept from the southern battlefields and troops came marching home, the maiden looked with favor on the brawny youth beneath the coat of faded blue. She preferred to trust her heart's happiness to the man of courage rather than to the man of wealth. That is the story of old. Years passed, age crept over the sweetheart of sixty-one and she died, as she had lived, happy in her choice. But time did not soften, death did not break the anguish, jealousy and feeling of revenge that rankled the heart of the disappointed lover. A bereaved mate, with Christian fortitude, awaited, like the soldier that he was, the command of his superior to join the ranks of those gone before.

Old William Brown, propping his bent form on a crooked cane, shuffled feebly along the winding path that led up from the street to the doors of the great state capitol. The white locks that hung

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almost to his shoulders glistened the more brightly in the sunlight because of the palsy-shaking head. He paused now and then, straightened his aged body and drew into his cramped lungs a deep breath of the fresh air. A little invigorated he laboriously continued his slow journey. At those pauses it was an inspiration to a passerby to look into that aged face, where love, hope, and faith had left all their marks of beauty. The old man still wore a loosely fitting suit of blue and now and then proudly felt, to be sure it still was there, a little bronze button in the coat lapel. He bent all the weight of his frail body against the heavy doors before they yielded entrance. Nor did he stop for rest until he had passed through the marble-lined rotunda and reached the grand staircase. Here in a niche of the wall behind a heavy glass was clustered a bunch of American flags. Some retained a little brilliancy, but most were faded, bullet-riddled and end-frayed. Some were so nearly shattered as to be held together only by a thin gauze sewed over them. On each was a small black placard with white figures. The old man's gaze centred on one, especially torn and shattered. He contemplated it seriously. Then with a sigh and shake of his head as he pointed to one said aloud to himself, "That was my flag."

"Aye, and mine too, comrade."

The voice startled him. Another in blue, a trifle younger, stood by his side. For a full minute the old soldiers gazed into each other's faces. William Brown, rubbing the back of his shrunken hand over his eyes as if to clear away a mist, finally stammered: "John Price, what you a doin' here?"

"Been elected sergeant-at-arms o' the senate," was the smiling reply "What you doin'?"

"Senator Berkley got me in as keeper of the 13th door."

As they grasped hands another figure paused in the rotunda, carefully bridged a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on a Roman nose and scrutinized with interest the two old men. He was dressed in simple but elegant clothes. His thinly drawn hand fumbled nervously his gold-headed cane, his withered lips twitched and then set firmly as he recognized the feebler soldier. This was the disappointed lover — Senator Rawson, as he had come to be, and he pounded his cane vehemently on the marble steps as

he made his way up the grand staircase to the legislative chamber above. The giving of doorkeeper positions to old soldiers as a sort of pension for meritorious service had long been a practice inviolate with the legislature.

The first five days of the session were consumed in the ordinary organization. Each day William Brown had climbed the long back stairs to the gallery door known as No. 13. The novelty of the first few days had passed and now, resigned to beautiful dreams of youthful days, he sat dozing with his hand upon the great brass knob, for but on the rarest occasions did visitors ever venture to this gallery.

From the floor below the speeches, the motions and the resolutions all reached his ear merely as a noisy rabble. So he caught not the importance of the action when on the sixth day Senator Rawson, chairman of the committee on retrenchment and reform, reported that the committee favored the abolishment of all but twelve doorkeepers. In all there were sixteen. The motion to adopt this report brought Senator Berkley to his feet. He asked to know why not abolish all but thirteen, to which the chairman responded that they had considered how little the doors above number twelve were used. This furnished a theme for objections by Senator Berkley who called attention to the fact that all doorkeepers were necessarily a luxury and could be entirely abolished, but that traditionally the positions had been reserved for compliments to old soldiers.

"I know not of the record of the other soldiers, but of one I can speak with certainty," he spoke in a loud distinct voice. "The Keeper of the 13th door is there by my request. He was one of the men who followed the flag at Fort Donnelson, where the fighting of the Civil War was turned to the South and kept from these northern states. He fought bravely and the regiment history tells how he braved the fire of the enemy's line to rescue and carry from the front to a place of safety a comrade wounded in the first onslaught. And that comrade is here to bear testimony. He is our worthy sergeant-at-arms. The keeper of the 13th door was one of the first to enlist and did not lay down his musket until the war was over. He was brave in battle, alert on the picket line and watchful of every post assigned him."

The gaunt black figure of Senator Rawson rose from the seat and gained recognition of the president.

"I insist, Mr. President," he spoke with intense sarcasm, "that the sergeant-at-arms remind the keeper of the 13th door, who is sleeping in his chair, that he is not maintaining the reputation for alertness that the senator from Poweshiek would establish."

The remark was taken humorously and the president directed the sergeant-at-arms to awaken the keeper of the 13th door. The senate officer's cheeks burned a deep red as he disappeared. Having gained the floor Senator Rawson took occasion to further defend the report of the committee and deplored the fact that as representatives of the people they were squandering large sums in maintaining unnecessary employees. He grew enthusiastic and had raised high his trembling hand to give emphasis to a final fling when he was interrupted by the thunderous voice of the sergeant-at-arms, who had reappeared at the back of the senate chamber and called:

"Mr. President."

"Mr. Sergeant-at-arms," recognized the chairman.

The old soldier straightened his figure to attention, a tear trickled down his wrinkled cheek and his voice trembled:

"I have to report, Mr. President, that your sergeant-at-arms is unable to perform the commission of this body."

Every senator gasped one breath and maintained the silence of astonishment for this seeming revolt. Blood rushed to the face of the old Senator Rawson, who still remained standing and whose figure now shook with rage. Then the President spoke.

"For what reason is the sergeant-at-arms unable to perform this commission?"

All members leaned inquiringly forward in their seats, while some of the older ones formed trumpets behind their ears with the palms of their hands. Every eye in the chamber was focused on the soldier who, his body shaking with emotion, paused as if trying to find words for appropriate answer. Suddenly, as if despairing of such power, he straightened his arms by his side, stood the attention of a soldier, seemed to swallow hard and then with a broken voice cried:

"The keeper of the 13th door is dead."

So old William Brown, who would otherwise have been lowly and poorly interred, was given a state burial from the senate chamber, his war record was eulogized and the 13th door was draped with heavy crepe throughout the remainder of the session, reminding daily the disappointed lover that he who studieth revenge keepeth his own wounds open.